



# American Citizen Services News

## *Back to school ... at last* The Damascus Community School reopens its doors



DCS cashier Mahmoud Nayfeh reports for duty.

After spending the last two years shrouded in uncertainty, the Damascus Community School in Abu Roumaneh sprang back to life August 25 as children, school officials, and well-wishers attended its reopening.

About 325 students are enrolled in grades KG-12 and the first day of classes was an emotional one for all the children and adults involved.



Students arrive for the first day of classes.

"This was an immensely important day for the American and international communities in Syria, and it was my pleasure to have been part of it," said U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Chuck Hunter. "The school's administration and staff have worked extremely hard, in a very short timeframe, to prepare the school to be opened again. That hard work shows in the revitalized facilities and in the preparedness of the teachers. The embassy is proud to have supported and contributed to the effort that resulted in opening this new chapter in DCS' long and distinguished history. Beyond the good news for U.S.-Syrian relations, we are simply happy that families here will have a new option for academic excellence in Damascus. The smiles on the faces of the students and parents on that first day of school said it all."

Dr. James L. Liebzeit, the school's director, concurred. "Excitement filled the campus as students, parents and teachers new to the school helped to re-open DCS," Liebzeit said. He added that DCS will make Syria a more attractive option for diplomats and professionals who are considering working here.

Although jubilant, Dr. Liebzeit and the school administration aren't resting on their laurels. He said a Parent Teacher Association will soon need to be organized, and the school looks forward to parent involvement in making this happen.

"The most important thing is that the school has reopened for our community. Students, parents, and teachers are excited to be back on campus and in an American school environment," said Dr. Liebzeit.



DCS Board Vice-Chairman Nasha'at Sanadiki, Director Dr. James L. Liebzeit, and U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Chuck Hunter.

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## Election season rolling on; time to register running out

Between now and November 2010, state, local and federal elections will be held across the United States.

All the seats in the House of Representatives, and 36 seats in the Senate, will be contested this year. Numerous state ballot initiatives and elections will also be decided during this year's election season.

In many cases, time is already running short. Congressional primaries and local and state elections have already been held in many jurisdictions.

If you plan to vote, it is essential that you take action soon.

The Embassy works to help American citizens overseas stay informed of procedures in place to ensure they are able to vote.

American citizens can visit the Embassy to get information packets on absentee voting. There are also extensive U.S. government and private resources online that can help.

### Federal Voting Assistance Program

A good place to start the registration process is [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) administers the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) on behalf of the Secretary of Defense.

The UOCAVA requires that the states and territories allow all U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S. to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal office. The same law designates FVAP to help voters get registered and participate in voting.

**YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS  
YOU!**



**To REGISTER, VOTE and Get  
EVERYONE  
You Know To Do So Also!**

The FVAP web site contains step-by-step instructions for getting registered through the states while living outside the U.S.

### Overseas Vote Foundation

One private resource to help prospective voters get registered and participate in elections is the Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF), which has a web page at

[www.overseasvotefoundation.org](http://www.overseasvotefoundation.org).

OVF's web site has extensive state-specific information, including steps for absentee registration, state-by-state election calendars, and brief overviews

of issues, races and ballot initiatives.

If you want to vote in your state elections but are unsure how to proceed, OVF is a great place to start.

### Election Assistance Commission

The Election Assistance Commission ([www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov)) also has excellent information and support for state and federal voters living overseas.

The EAC Web site is a national clearinghouse of information on all aspects of election administration, from voting system testing and certification to data on how Americans voted in recent federal elections.

EAC maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form, which voters can use to register to vote and update their registration information. The form is available in seven languages.

EAC also provides voter guides in 11 languages and a variety of links to helpful resources for voters relating to registration, military and overseas voting, accessibility, and volunteering as a poll worker.

### Helpful links

- Federal Voting Assistance Program: <http://www.fvap.gov/>
- National Voter Registration form: [http://www.eac.gov/files/voter/nvra\\_update.pdf](http://www.eac.gov/files/voter/nvra_update.pdf)
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission: <http://www.eac.gov>
- Overseas Vote Foundation: <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/>

## Overseas Voters: Request a Ballot for the September Statewide and Congressional Primary elections!

The following States hold Statewide and Congressional Primary Elections in September 2010.

- Guam - September 4
- Virgin Islands - September 11
- Delaware - September 14
- District of Columbia - September 14
- Maryland - September 14
- Massachusetts - September 14
- New Hampshire - September 14
- New York - September 14
- Rhode Island - September 14
- Wisconsin - September 14
- Hawaii - September 18



## What if the absentee ballot arrives late?

If you requested an absentee ballot but have not received one close to election day, you can still vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). In order to be eligible to use this back-up ballot, you must:

- Be absent from your voting residence;
- Have applied for a regular ballot early enough so the request is received by the appropriate local election official not later than the State deadline; or the date that is 30 days before the general election; AND
- Have not received the requested regular absentee ballot from the state.

Hardcopies of the FWAB are available through Voting Assistance Officers at U.S. embassies/consulates. An [online version](#) is also available, which must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and mailed to your local election official. Check out your state's instructions to determine your state specific instructions, witness/notary requirements for voted ballots, deadlines, and mailing addresses.



## Planning a holiday trip? Heed the following tips

The end of Ramadan and the Eid Al-Fitr holiday are traditionally a time when Syrians and foreigners residing in Syria head out on vacation. The following advice for travelers is taken from the State Department's official web site.

For detailed information about steps you can keep yourself and your family safe while traveling, see The State Department's online guide on [How to Have a Safe Trip](#). Meanwhile, here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

- **Register so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:** Register your travel plans with the State Department through our free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.
- **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.
- **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
- **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.
- **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department web site at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html) has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit, including country-specific information about Syria and neighboring countries.
- **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.
- **Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas. **The U.S. Embassy in Syria can be reached any time at 3391-4444.**

The Embassy has noted an increase in reports of pick-pocketing in the Old City of Damascus. If you are planning to stay in town over the holiday, please take due precautions.

## American Language Center Test Dates

<i>Test</i>	<i>August 2010</i>	<i>Septem- ber 2010</i>	<i>October 2010</i>	<i>November 2010</i>	<i>December 2010</i>
<b>ITP</b>	Monday, August 9 Thursday, August 26	Monday, September 13 Thursday, September 30	Thursday, October 14 Thursday, October 28	Wednesday, No- vember 10 Tuesday, November 23	Thursday, December 9 Tuesday, December 28
<b>GRE</b>	N/A	N/A	Subject Test Saturday, October 9  General Test Saturday, October 23	Subject Test Saturday, November 13  General Test Saturday, November 20	N/A
<b>SAT</b>	N/A	N/A	Saturday, October 9	Saturday, November 6	Saturday, December 4
<b>TOEFL</b>	Saturday, August 14	N/A	Saturday, October 16	Saturday, November 13	N/A
<b>TSE</b>	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered
<b>TOEIC</b>	Wednesday, Au- gust 25	Wednesday, Sep- tember 29	Wednesday, Octo- ber 27	Wednesday, No- vember 24	Wednesday, December 29

## Advice concerning U.S. visas for family members

We get many questions from American citizens in Syria who seek advice on how to help their family members get an immigrant visa or visitor visa. Consular officers at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus are committed to facilitating legitimate travel to the United States. The best thing you can do for your family and friends who wish to immigrate or travel to the U.S. is to help them be prepared. Following are some helpful tips:



### Tips for Immigration Visa Petitioners

- When locally filing a petition for your spouse, parent or children, make sure that you are able to demonstrate that you intend to return to a permanent residence in the U.S. once the immigrant visa is issued to your immediate relative. Evidence of such intent may include a job offer, enrollment of your children in school, establishment of U.S. bank accounts, voting records in the U.S., filing of state or local tax declarations, or ownership of property in the U.S.
- When petitioning for a spouse, please make sure that your marriage is a) legally recognized in the country where the marriage occurred and recognizable under U.S. law; and b) that any previous marriages have been terminated with a final and irrevocable divorce.
- If your child was born after you became an American citizen, you are encouraged to check with the American Citizens Services Unit at the US Embassy to determine whether your child may qualify for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad. In the event that the child does not qualify for US citizenship, you will need to file an I-130 petition on behalf of this child for purposes of immigration.
- American citizens are encouraged to take appropriate measures to ensure that they do not fall prey to persons eager to cultivate a relationship solely for the purpose of seeking immigration benefits.

### Tips for Non-Immigration Visa Applicants

- In completing the electronic application forms, verify that all questions have been answered
- Verify that all answers are accurate and complete
- Avoid common errors in completing the application (i.e. indicate all previous travel and names of parents)
- Failure to submit complete and accurate answers will result in delays in the application process; in some instances the electronic form will need to be resubmitted in its entirety
- The requirement for administrative processing prior to issuing a visa adds time to the visa process. While the additional time required is often only a week or two, it can occasionally be much longer. If you wish to ensure you don't miss your travel dates, apply well in advance of your desired travel dates (we recommend that a person apply three months in advance of planned travel).
- To schedule an appointment for a visitor visa interview, please visit our web site at [http://damascus.usembassy.gov/non-immigrant\\_visas/apply.html](http://damascus.usembassy.gov/non-immigrant_visas/apply.html).

## Consular visit to American communities in Northern Syria

In carrying out its role to safeguard the welfare of U.S. citizens abroad, consular personnel reach out to Americans overseas through a range of media — from newsletters like this one to visits to places in the country where Americans live. In August, Vice Consul Jason Smith visited Americans in Hassake and Qamishli to meet with American citizens and better understand the local communities.

“It is important to recognize the role of our locally resident American citizens in representing America to the people of Syria,” said Smith.

The U.S. Embassy estimates that there are over 10,000 Americans living in Syria — some as short term visitors, tourists and students, and some who have made Syria their home. The American communities in Syria, like those throughout the world, continue to have strong cultural connections to the United States, with patterns of migration and travel in both directions.

Meeting Americans in the communities where they live helps consuls develop a better understanding of the circumstances in which Americans find themselves outside the United States and how the consuls might better assist in providing routine U.S. government services, or during an emergency.

While in the region, Smith also visited the offices of DHL. DHL provides a secure way for Americans in the region to renew or add

extra pages to their passports without having to travel all the way to Damascus. He also visited the local branch of Banque Bemo Saudi Fransi, where the manager showed him the process for conveniently collecting the fee for a U.S. nonimmigrant visa application in advance in a person’s visa interview, making the application process faster.

Smith was impressed by the warmth of the people he met and said “We very much appreciate the wonderful hospitality of the people of this region.”

In October, a Vice Consul is planning visits to more cities and regions in Syria that have large numbers of American Citizens. On these visits, the Vice Consul will be prepared to provide Consular services that are normally available only at the Embassy in Damascus.



### Did you know ... helpful links for Americans in Syria

- U.S. Embassy in Damascus: <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/>
- Latest State Department Country-Specific Information Sheet for Syria:  
[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1035.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1035.html)
- State Department Worldwide Caution document, released August 12, 2010:  
[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/pa/pa\\_4787.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_4787.html)
- American Cultural Center Facebook page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/syria.usembassy>



- American Language Center: <http://www.alc-sy.com/v2/>
- Information about taxes: <http://www.irs.gov>
- Information about social security: <http://www.ssa.gov>

## Embassy announcing new ways to reach Americans

The U.S. Embassy in Damascus will be announcing several new ways to communicate with American citizens in Syria over the coming months.

One of the core consular functions is to assist American citizens in the event of large-scale emergencies. The key to making this system work is individual citizens' registration with the Embassy. We encourage all Americans to register and to ensure that the contact information they have provided to the Embassy is up to date.

In particular, we are planning to add SMS messages to the several ways we share vital information with American citizens during a crisis. If you did not provide your mobile phone information when you registered with the Embassy, please update your informa-

tion at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. Please be assured that, in accordance with the provisions of the [Privacy Act](#), all registration information is treated as confidential and can not be shared without the subject's consent.

In addition to this augmented system for reaching citizens in case of emergencies, the Embassy also plans to launch a Facebook page in the coming weeks that will act as a forum for American Citizen Services and visa issues. The new forum will be a place for American citizens and Embassy representatives to discuss issues of importance to the American community in Syria. Future articles in this newsletter will first be published through the Facebook page, and members of the public will have a chance to ask questions



## American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

For appointments, please go to our website at :  
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

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American Citizen Services  
Consular Section**

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### **UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES**

September 05, Sunday	Labor Day
September 12, Sunday	Al-Fitr Holiday
September 30, Thursday	Section Closed
October 6, Wednesday	Liberation Day
October 10, Sunday	Columbus Day
October 28, Thursday	Section Closed

"Assisting approximately 4 million Americans who reside overseas and nearly 60 million who travel abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. Government.

Though consular work is punctuated by extraordinary acts to help U.S. citizens during times of crisis or urgent need, it is built upon a foundation of services provided to an American public that increasingly lives, works, and learns in the global community."

-- Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan.